

Interview with Nancy Forbord

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Foreign Service Spouse Series

NANCY FORBORD

Interviewed by: Monique Wong

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Q: This is Monique Wong. I'm interviewing Nancy Forbord for the Foreign Service Spouse Oral History and today is December 14, 1992.

Good, Nancy, here we are. I've been waiting for this interview for several weeks. I thought I would start with your role in training. This has to be one of the most important contributions I think you have made and you are still making to the Foreign Service. Both training families and officers. Perhaps we can spend a little time on discussing that? Could you tell me first of all how you got involved and when that was?

FORBORD: In training?

Q: Yes.

FORBORD: Well I first got involved, I guess, actually when I became a CLO in 1980 in Jamaica. I didn't realize that was really part of the job. I had done some teaching before. I had taught using the Calvert System (home instruction program used by families abroad to teach generations of Foreign Service children) in Gabon with children. And I had done some substitute teaching in Milan, Italy and also here in Washington. I had done a lot of storytelling. At one point I had done storytelling as a semi-career. It was for about three years and I did it mostly in libraries and with children's groups, parties for kids, and things

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like that. And I loved doing that because I have a background in dramatic arts and had always loved drama. I felt the storytelling tied in so well with Foreign Service life because traveling around you collect all these stories. So I found that I had particularly good African stories that I used to like to use, particularly with children. So I did a lot of that.

And when I got the job as a CLO, part of the responsibility was to train people, basically to give them an orientation, when they first came to post. As I said, at the time I didn't realize it was training. I thought it was sort of program planning and introducing people to life in Jamaica. But I realize now that really what I was doing was training.

Q: That was between 1980.

FORBORD: 1980 - '82.

Q: So you were two years as a CLO?

FORBORD: Yes, two years. And then when we came back to the States, I started on a master's degree in health promotion counseling which was an interesting topic. I was really interested - I had always been interested in health issues - and I was interested in counseling because of the job in Jamaica as a CLO. And so as part of the work for the master's there was a great deal of focus on workshops because, to reach the largest number of people in any kind of health promotion, workshops are the way to go. So we did a lot of work around planning workshops, which basically involves training, and I began to see that what I'd been doing in Jamaica had a connection to this in terms of setting goals for learning and trying to reach a diverse population with a certain amount of information. And in the course of that program, I planned a number of workshops for different age groups and found I really enjoyed that.

From that work, I got my job at the Overseas Briefing Center in which I started doing a lot of training, and it became a lot more focused. What I found was so much of what I did there at the Briefing Center was basically transferring a lot of my experience to other

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people through training. And so I really started training with the Overseas Briefing Center, and I started training on a regular basis because that's what the OBC does. It's certainly one of its most important functions.

Q: So when were you at OBC, Nancy?

FORBORD: I was at OBC starting in January, 1988, and I was there until June of 1990. And I learned there to design training programs and plan programs for employees and family members, and did a great deal of training around community dynamics, community building, planning for overseas, protocol, U.S. representation abroad; also training on an individual basis for people who were planning for assignment overseas.

Q: With whom did you work at that time?

FORBORD: In the OBC?

Q: Yes.

FORBORD: Well, when I first started, Jean German was the director and Lee Lacy was the deputy. And then Jean left, just about the time, in fact, that the OBC became a separate school within FSI. It had been connected with Area Studies and became a separate school at that time. And then Lee became the director and so I worked as the information center coordinator.

Q: Let's back up a little bit. I just want to get some of the details clear here. Jean German - wasn't she the first coordinator (Position of title is "director.") of the Overseas Briefing Center?

FORBORD: No, no. The first person was Joan Wilson, and Fanchon Silberstein was the second, I believe. And then I think Jean after that.

Q: Okay. And at that point, you were with the office downstairs at C-Level.

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FORBORD: Yes. When I came in, the office had just moved downstairs. And at that point there was sort of a separation between training operations upstairs and information center operations downstairs. And so I became actually, I guess, the first coordinator of the downstairs. Well, that's not quite true. Marge Ness was here as relocation advisor. When the office moved downstairs, my job became coordinator of the Information Center and that's what I was doing.

Q: I see. And then what was the upstairs office for?

FORBORD: The upstairs office ran all the administration functions, workshop planning and preparation, and training coordination. That was all from upstairs.

Q: So was Lee Lacy the first director of that office?

FORBORD: You mean of the office that was separated?

Q: Right.

FORBORD: Jean was there when the separation took place. The separation took place in September and Jean left in February. So she was, really, I guess you would say the first director of the separated offices. I don't think anybody in the OBC ever liked to think of it as being separated, but in fact the logistics were such that it was separated.

Q: At least physically they were separated.

FORBORD: Physically, yes, physically.

Q: And also in the sense of having expanded as well, in space and otherwise?

FORBORD: Yes, definitely. Absolutely. In fact, the operation went from serving more or less 8,000 people a year to serving about 13,000 when it moved downstairs. It increased dramatically. When it moved downstairs, it was more accessible to people and there was

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so much more space. So you could expand and encourage people to come. You know, more than perhaps had previously been done just because of the space.

Q: So prior to the people who were in charge of OBC before Jean German had only one office on the fourth floor.

FORBORD: Yes, and everybody was there. And all the business was there. And you can imagine that...

Q: That officers would come for information and that's where they would go.

FORBORD: Yes, yes, that was it. You could go there in one little room and see the videos. There were all the post boxes there. So the only separation was that there was the director's office behind glass and both Lee and Jean had their offices in there. You can imagine how crowded it was.

Q: I can!

FORBORD: It was amazing. So it was really a wonderful thing when they got the space downstairs and we moved down there.

Q: Tell me a little bit more about the operation of OBC during those couple of years when you were there since you were really the first one to get that office on C-Level going.

FORBORD: How it operated, you mean basically, and how it expanded?

Q: Yes. And also how you set up the things and the various things that exist now probably have roots in the original plan and so on.

FORBORD: You know, it's really interesting because I think that most of what goes on now was in the original plan which is really interesting to me. I think that the original people who started the Overseas Briefing Center really did think pretty much of everything in terms of

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the original idea. I think what happened was there was an expansion, an ability to serve many, many more people. And many more specific individual needs than there had been before. I think moving downstairs enabled us, for example, to expand the video operations. To expand the amount of information in each post box. Certainly to expand the slide show area because we went from, I think, one little slide show carrel to - now I think there are six or seven, at least.

Q: Probably at least something for each post.

FORBORD: Yes, exactly. So I think in that sense there was a lot more possibility to distribute and make available so much more information for people. In the area of culture guides, for example. That could also be expanded. As we expanded downstairs in terms of space, we also expanded in terms of staff. And that enabled us to do a lot more work. When I first started, it was just me and an information assistant in the front. And now it's the information coordinator, two information assistants, and an information specialist. So it's now gone from two people to four.

Q: And full-time.

FORBORD: Well, when I first started, my job was not full-time, it was four days a week. I believe the information assistant was full-time. Now the two information assistants each work four days a week, and the information specialist and the coordinator are full-time, so it's really expanded in terms of what you can do because there are so many more people there in the office.

Q: Would you say the focus is on giving information to officers and families for overseas posting rather than assistance in the Washington area?

FORBORD: Yes, I would. I'd say definitely. In fact one of the things we were trying to do was find some way that we could provide more information for people coming back, although I have to say there was not nearly as much interest as you might think. We

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would get calls from people maybe asking for some information like where to stay, that kind of thing about schools and we would refer them to the Family Liaison Office at that point. Maybe they would call with problems, and we would refer them to employee consultation service. But in terms of people actually coming in and really wanting a whole lot of information about Washington, we didn't see very much of that.

We tried, in fact, to set up some things that might make it easier. You know we started the returnee file for people who went overseas. We tried to do a similar thing for here in the States and very few people seemed to be interested. They were interested maybe the first couple of weeks, and then it petered out.

Q: Interesting. But yet everybody seemed to be saying that Washington is one of the hardest posts to adjust to.

FORBORD: I know. It's very interesting. And in fact I know that the Family Liaison Office does get a lot of calls and they do want certain kinds of information like babysitting information or schools. But general cultural information, which is what the Overseas Briefing Center is so good at, basically people don't think... At least they know the culture when they think of the United States. So that's not such an interest.

Q: I guess that makes sense. Except for, of course, the foreign-born spouses whom I've been working with.

FORBORD: Yes, that's right. Of course! And it did interest me in a way that we didn't have very many foreign-born spouses coming in to look at that kind of information or talk about that, although I know they took a lot of courses that had to do with American studies.

Q: Nancy, do you happen to know - we were talking about the original ideas for OBC - do you happen to know a little bit of the history of how it got started?

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FORBORD: Well I know that AAFSW had a big role to play. I know that. And I know there were a number of people who felt that spouses, particularly spouses, I think, and family members, needed a lot more support than they were getting in terms of information. Not so much in terms of counseling, but in terms of information. There had been a wives' course that had been given starting, I guess, years and years ago, starting in the '40's or '50's, that wives took. And I think that was really the start of the Overseas Briefing Center even though it wasn't called that. It wasn't until it became much broader that it was named the Overseas Briefing Center.

Q: There was Dorothy Stansbury. Does that name ring a bell?

FORBORD: Yes, yes. Her name does definitely. You know, I don't really know that much about it. I know that Barbara Hoganson knows a lot about the beginnings. We used to talk about it. I know that there were trips, I believe paid, in fact, to people who went to visit briefing centers. I know that in Canada, for example, there was one that was there that the Canadians had set up for their technical assistants. The Canadians had a big body of people who used to go all over the world offering technical assistance, like our AID (Agency for International Development). And I know they had one. And I think the people from here went up there to look at theirs when they decided to set up the Overseas Briefing Center to plan on how they would set it up, give them ideas (Joan Wilson proposed the Overseas Briefing Center after attending a meeting in Canada. See her transcript in this collection. Wilson's was the most eloquent and measured voice on spouse concerns in the 1970s.).

Q: But it basically started with Joan Wilson?

FORBORD: I think it did. I believe that Joan was the originator, or certainly the first director.

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Q: Is it a fair statement to make that OBC is the training arm for family in the Foreign Service located at the Foreign Service Institute [now the National Foreign Affairs Training Center]

FORBORD: I would say training and information, that would be how I would characterize it.

Q: So how does an administrative type of thing work? I suppose the funding comes totally from the Foreign Service Institute?

FORBORD: For administrative in the sense of...

Q: Running the office.

FORBORD: Oh yes, it all comes from the Foreign Service Institute. Yes.

Q: How would you describe how OBC is perceived by other arms in other offices in the Foreign Service Institute?

FORBORD: You want me to be honest?

Q: Yes, please.

FORBORD: I think that of late people are beginning to recognize that the Overseas Briefing Center fulfills a very, very special function and fulfills it better than anybody else could. I think for a long time it was viewed as kind of - I don't know how you would characterize it - as a step-child, perhaps of the Foreign Service Institute. That it was an area that had a job to do, but I think many people did not consider it or take it as seriously as they took other functions.

I think that part of it has to do with the fact that the Foreign Service has not taken spouses seriously over the years. I think with the Foreign Service, like any bureaucracy, it's not the fault of the individual. I think bureaucracies do not like to have any kind of

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commotion from the outside or any kind of element that may do something to destabilize the bureaucracy. And I think that spouses in the Foreign Service are, by the nature of the Foreign Service, an element that could do that. The fact that they are more closely tied to the bureaucracy than other spouses would be because of the nature of moving around with that bureaucracy.

And I think because of that, perhaps, there was for a long time a sense that the OBC was a spouses' thing. And since nothing else about spouses was taken seriously, I think the Overseas Briefing Center was not taken as seriously as it deserved to be. Because from the first that I knew of it, it was a very professionally run organization. And I think, in fact, probably has had as much, if not more to do with the quality of training at FSI, as any other school. I think that some of the things that the Overseas Briefing Center has done in their training have been the most innovative. Not to say that the School of Professional Studies does not do a fabulous job because they do. But I think in the area of family training, some of the things that the Overseas Briefing Center does is done nowhere else and certainly not done as well, I'm sure, anyplace else as it's done here. I think now there's beginning to be a recognition that the Overseas Briefing Center is unique and does offer extremely high quality training.

Maybe part of the reason that the OBC was not regarded as seriously as it deserved was because spouses move around of course, are forced to, you know, if they're going to travel with their employee spouse. The fact that they are not often or have not been career Foreign Service or Civil Service, and I think that that's been viewed as just a sign that they are not professional. Because they can only stay a short time, therefore they must be just ad hoc. And it's a shame because that's certainly not the case. I think that the experiences that they have had overseas usually have made them much, much more capable of doing this kind of work than anybody else could who stayed in one place and never traveled with the Foreign Service.

Q: So most of the people who work at OBC are spouses of...

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FORBORD: Many of them have been. I don't know right now what the situation is. When I was there, most of them were. Which in terms of work at the Information Center was very important. Much of what they did was to really assist people who were getting ready to travel overseas and planning for a life in the Foreign Service.

Q: How would you describe the relationship between OBC and FLO, at least from your experience at the time you were the Coordinator?

FORBORD: I think it's been very good. I think that certainly, from what I see now, they work together extremely well, supporting each other.

Q: How do they support each other?

FORBORD: Well I think that one of the ways they do it is by recognizing and appreciating that they have very different functions. By realizing that FLO works very, very closely with management in assisting spouses and family members to be aware of how the Foreign Service can help them and ways that it can't. And helping spouses and family members and employees to have access to the services. I think the Overseas Briefing Center, on the other hand, is not involved with that, but is involved with assisting people in training, information and referral which is really a very different function.

Q: In general, you have said that the quality of the training is very high and I think that's 100% correct. Do you think that it does also prepare the Foreign Service spouses well for overseas?

FORBORD: Yes, I think it does, definitely. I think that, from what I've seen. You know, I've not gone over and conducted a study with spouses. It would be interesting sometime to do that. To check with people once they're overseas and find out. My impression has been that it's offered them a new way to look at all the transitions they've faced and helped them to inform themselves so that they can prepare themselves for realistic expectations in going to the new post. I think probably in that area, maybe more than any other, it's really

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been successful in helping people to establish realistic expectations and develop skills around those realistic expectations.

Q: And would you say also planning is a major theme throughout all the training?

FORBORD: I would think so. Definitely. Yes, planning for whatever you can to make sure that your life over there is as successful as it can be.

Q: You received a Meritorious Honor Award that's from the State Department? For the work at OBC?

FORBORD: No, I received it for my work as CLO in Kingston. I received a joint award at OBC. There was a joint award, a Meritorious Honor Award that was given to, I believe, four of us at OBC. Primarily connected with that year when we made the move and there was such an incredible increase in requested services and work where we all just worked around the clock trying to meet the needs of all the people coming to the OBC.

Q: How have the training needs changed over the years since you were Coordinator? You're still doing a lot of training now for OBC. Have you perceived any kind of change in any way?

FORBORD: Well certainly I would say that I think spouses' needs have changed. I think that the area of employment is much, much more important than it used to be to spouses. I think education for children and helping children to adjust has always been important. I think, though, that employment for spouses is becoming more and more important, and anything that people can do to make themselves more prepared for that. I think that would be a general focus. And I think it plays into almost any kind of work you do with spouses. Anything that you can do to help them prepare themselves so that once they get there, they will be able to encounter any situation, and if it works out for them to find employment as a result, they'll be ready for it.

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Q: Would you say the need for employment is also a reflection of the changes of the spouses as well? What they are now and what they were before?

FORBORD: Well I think it's two things. I think one thing, it's economic. That many, many spouses now, most spouses, need employment in terms of being able to pay the bills and particularly in preparing for children's education needs. I think that's a big one. So I think the economics are probably the number one. I don't know for sure again, but it makes sense. The other reason it's so important is that many people feel if they have too large a gap in any kind of work, when they come back to the States, it'll be very hard for them to get a job. So it's not just the money at post, it's also the fact that when they come back, so as not to have to start down on the bottom of the rung again.

Q: It's the continuity that we keep thinking of having to maintain when we move around.

FORBORD: Exactly. I think that's what it is. And always increasing skills, practice, just generally keeping yourself ready to be able to come back into the job market when you're back in the States. Not to say that there aren't spouses who choose not to work. There are many who choose not to work. Many who feel that they'd rather not. They'd rather just benefit from the experience of being there, which is wonderful. I think if a person chooses that, there's no end to what they can do at the post in terms of experiences.

Q: I suppose the other factor could be also the background of spouses. Perhaps they're more educated now? Would you agree?

FORBORD: You know, I really would not agree with that, no. I would not say they're more educated. I think that society places more expectations on them in terms of what they're going to do with their lives in terms of a career. I think that the level of education of spouses in the Foreign Service has always been extremely high.

Q: That was my impression, too.

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FORBORD: Yes, I think it always has been. I just think that because of the way our society was prior to several years ago, most spouses did not anticipate working for a lifetime. And I think again that the economics were such that maybe they didn't need to as much as they do now. Even spouses here who lived in the States all the time didn't necessarily work, so it wasn't just Foreign Service spouses. It was a change of expectations and what spouses, women in particular, want to do with their lives, I would say. I do think, though, along those lines, that because of the expectations, because of the desire of most spouses now to work, I think there is a lot more frustration overseas than there used to be.

Q: Is that right?

FORBORD: Yes, in terms of employment. I think that because work is so hard to find that's both rewarding and well-paying that there is a lot more frustration in that area. When we first came into the Foreign Service, I don't remember employment initially as being even a topic of discussion. It was nice if a person found a job if they wanted to, but many spouses didn't want to. You know, there wasn't that pressure like there is now.

Q: So there's a societal pressure. The expectation of women to be working and having a successful career as well as a successful family life and children and so on.

FORBORD: That's right. And I think also the reality of society in terms of duration of marriages. I think many women need to prepare themselves in case they ever are alone. I think there's a lot to that. I think that generally speaking women nowadays think that they really do need to be able to provide for themselves independently, if the need ever arises.

Q: Interesting.

FORBORD: And I think very often women didn't used to think about that.

Q: That's true. Well, there's always accidents, too, that you don't look for.

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FORBORD: Of course. You never know. You know a long time ago, somehow, people didn't think about that. But I think that that, now coupled with divorce, with some people deciding to live separate lives as some people do, that there's a lot more to consider.

Q: Nancy, perhaps we can move on to some points about training for children. We just mentioned that a little bit earlier. Tell me first of all your perspective on how different it is, or if it is different, to prepare children for overseas and to prepare adults, say spouses or officers.

FORBORD: I think it's very different. Not that a lot of us as spouses sometimes don't... I've found going overseas that very often I seem to regress (laughter) and really have some of the emotional needs that children have. I think that happens sometimes when you go into a new environment. But I think the difference is that as adults, we generally are much more able to express that than children are, and I think that we can anticipate some of our needs, and I think very often children can't. So it's hard to train children in the sense that you may not be able to anticipate what their specific needs are because they may not be able to identify those. With adults it's a lot easier, I think, for them to identify their own needs, not completely, but easier than it is with kids.

Q: And also I was thinking that perhaps one month for a child of three or four years old is a lot of time relative to a month to a twenty year old or a thirty year old.

FORBORD: Yes, I think even in life term experiences. First of all, as you say, to them two years just seems like a lifetime. To us, two years... Maybe we have to change our lives. Maybe we're not quite as content as we would be, but it's two years and we know that's all it is. But for a child those two years could be two extremely important years, and the child may not even be able to understand how here she could leave her friends and home for two years. So I think there is a real difference in perspective.

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Q: Would you tell me, since OBC is the major training arm for the Foreign Service, how OBC provides training for children? What are the different areas, perhaps different focuses, and whether you think that the training provided for children is sufficient?

FORBORD: Well, I can only tell you about my experience when I was there because right now I'm not sure exactly what they're doing since I'm no longer in that office, so I have to tell you that my experience was up until 1990. And since then I have still been connected with the Foreign Service Youth Foundation, so from that viewpoint I can tell you also what I know, but I can't tell you currently exactly what courses they are offering.

Q: Of course.

FORBORD: But my experience was that, first of all, what they offered were the courses for parents and children. The going overseas workshops in which parents come with their children for Saturday morning workshops. And that's three hours. And I think what's really good about that program is that it offers children an opportunity to really discuss with their parents, maybe for the first time, how they feel about the move, and they're encouraged to do that.

Q: When did the program start?

FORBORD: That started roughly at least ten or twelve years ago. It's been going on a long time, and is still very, very successful.

Q: So children weren't neglected by any means right at the beginning of OBC.

FORBORD: Not as far as I know, although again, I don't know the real early years of OBC, but I think the Going Overseas Workshop was one of the first things they did. It may even go back farther than that. It might. It very well might.

Q: It sounds like it was there all along.

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FORBORD: So they offered that for children and teenagers as well. They also offered courses for parents, for example, in educating your child abroad; in helping to create resiliency in children in the Foreign Service. That's a topic that I think is very interesting, and I think Dr. Elimor Rigamer has been instrumental in really alerting people to the special needs of children in the Foreign Service.

Q: Didn't he make a video or something?

FORBORD: Yes, he's made a couple of videos. In fact, there was a series made in which - I don't know if the OBC actually made the videos, but I think they played a role in making these sort of landmark videos back about 1980 that had to do with issues around families that were very, very good. They're still down there in the OBC and they're funny to look at because they're old. The people look like - long hair - you know the way they looked in the late '70's.

Q: Yes, and the clothes. The checkered skirts or something?

FORBORD: Yes. But as far as what the people and kids were talking about, it's basically the same things they still talk about. So in that sense, they're still very current.

Q: What else?

FORBORD: I think the big change - there was two areas. One area was the Foreign Service - I mean the Around the World in a Lifetime - AWAL for kids. And I think in that regard not as much had been done for children as could of have been done. That was re-entry - coming back to the States. And a group of kids actually got together with a couple of adults and decided to start this club for Foreign Service kids coming back to the States, and they called it AWAL - Around the World in a Lifetime.

And I think that that was probably the biggest change for kids maybe in the history of the Foreign Service in that it was finally a recognition that children coming back from overseas

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had very special issues that they needed to address. And that they needed to support each other and meet kids like them who had been through what they had been through. The recognition that coming back was very, very difficult for kids, particularly teenagers. After being in a very protected environment overseas, coming back and facing American teenagers, you can imagine, is not necessarily easy.

Q: You haven't seen all the TV shows.

FORBORD: Exactly. And going into a huge high school not knowing a soul, and you know how difficult it is for kids. So that group was founded. I think that started about 1982. And they started with annual retreats for the kids - the AWAL getaway. And that's still going on. I know the last one that I went on which was not this year in November, but a year ago November, there were about 60 kids on that retreat. And they have a great time talking about their experiences and getting to know each other. And from that have emerged a lot of other activities for kids coming back. There's year-round activities planned. And what you have now is an umbrella group called The Foreign Service Youth Foundation that is basically the umbrella group to make sure that AWAL keeps going and tries to support AWAL however it can to make sure that activities are generated for kids.

Q: Is that part of OBC or FLO?

FORBORD: Well OBC and FLO and the Office of Overseas Schools and AAFSW all play a part. OBC is very important in this because they offer so many of the programs. They offer the re-entry program for the kids coming back in September. They also offer a day-long getaway program where they go off to Camp Hemlock and do different activities to promote teamwork. A number of other activities are sponsored throughout the year.

And then of course FLO has a big part to play in support. They help with the newsletter, they have a position over there now which is a point position, I would say, for parents and teenagers when they come back to contact, to find out about activities for kids in the area, and to support the activities of AWAL. AAFSW has consistently funded activities of AWAL,

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and Office of Overseas Schools has given a large, good substantial grant year by year to help support this activity. So I think there's an awful lot of involvement right now from different areas of the State Department trying to support activities for teenagers.

The other real change has been the security overseas seminar that the OBC offers, and they developed a really extensive teen program that prepares kids on security issues for going overseas.

Q: Describe for me a moment here, Nancy, please, about the children. How do they compare to "regular" children? Children who don't move around that much.

FORBORD: Foreign Service children?

Q: Yes.

FORBORD: Well, there's been studies done, looks taken if not studies done of Foreign Service kids to find out how they're different. I'm not an expert. I'll tell you there are many people who know much more about it than I do.

Q: What you saw.

FORBORD: But from what I've seen, and I think pretty much this is borne out in the information on the research that is written about Foreign Service kids, and kids who generally move around and live in different cultures, not just Foreign Service, but kids who move around with military or with companies. There are some differences in the Foreign Service, and we'll talk about that in a second.

But I think there is a tendency for example for the kids not to identify with one place where they live. They seem to have a sense of being from a lot of different places. If you ask them where they're from, they may not be able to tell you where they're from. Or they may

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say, "Right now I'm from..." But not "I'm permanently from" or "I've always been from..." So they have a sense, I think, of rootlessness.

They tend to be, I think, much more inclined to try to get to know people very quickly and try to establish relationships quickly. On the other hand, some of them don't. Some of them retreat completely and decide they're just not going to make any more friends. If they have an experience at a certain time in their lives that may be difficult for them, they may decide that it's too difficult, too hard leaving friends.

Q: How was it for your children?

FORBORD: For mine? I think for mine, they went through stages. And I think you'll find that Foreign Service children go through stages. There are times when it's very easy to travel with them. There may be other times when it's very difficult. I finally found mine were different. Certain times were very easy for one and difficult for the other, and certain times were difficult for the other and easy for the one.

Q: How far apart are they in age?

FORBORD: Just two years. So not very far apart. But I found, for example, that one loved the experience of being overseas as a young child. It was just wonderful and I think has formed his view of the world which is a very international type view. He really loves people, loves different kinds of people. For my other child, I think that was difficult because she is a person who really valued friendships very, very highly, and I think for her to have to break off friendships and move on was very difficult. The later years were easier for her. When she became a teenager, I think that it was easier for her in the Foreign Service. She was, I would say, more scholarly, and I think it was interesting for her in a sense to see how the people learned and that kind of thing.

I think for my other child at this time, I think the teen years were a very, very difficult time for him to move. So they had a real different experience, although they've both come out

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of it now having a very similar viewpoint of the world which is one that is, I would say, very, very international. They regard the world as a very big place. They certainly respect people of all cultures, have no patience with intolerance at all, and find that most Americans have a real limited view in terms of the possibilities of people working together and really respecting the gifts of people who are different from them. I think that they are different.

Q: What are they doing now?

FORBORD: They're both in school. My son is in college in California and would like to do something in international work. My daughter is working in New York City and would like to work with people in social services in some way.

Q: Without sounding sexist, Nancy, do you think that the sex of the child has anything to do with how they react to the Foreign Service life or not?

FORBORD: Not from my experience, and not from what I've seen. It may in some cultures. I would say if you were in a culture and really heavily involved in that culture, where you were not living in an American compound, where you were really part of that culture, and your child, particularly a female child perhaps, is exposed to a culture that maybe did not reinforce independence, for example, like ours does, I think it could have an impact.

I'll tell you actually where I did notice this, which is interesting to me. When we went to Australia, I did notice that my daughter was very bothered by the fact that girls were not necessarily encouraged to perform to, what she thought to be, their potential. She thought that girls were regarded kind of second-rate.

Q: Really? In Australia?

FORBORD: In Australia.

Q: And that was only a few years ago, wasn't it?

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FORBORD: Yes, when she was a teenager. She felt that girls were not taken very seriously. And that bothered her.

Q: I just wanted to see what year that was. That was '86.

FORBORD: '86, when she was in 9th grade. We've talked about this a lot since, and I think my son agrees. He thinks she's right, that women are not regarded as highly in Australia as they are perhaps here in the Washington area.

Q: Nancy, we were talking about children in the Foreign Service and you mention that your daughter and your son had very different experiences, or different at different stages. I've heard a lot about how children are socialized in terms of female and male child. Perhaps it's a little bit more difficult for a girl child to be moving around, losing her friends, because they tend to be in close circles. Would you agree?

FORBORD: It's possible. I'm just thinking in terms of what I was saying before about my daughter, of the fact that she reached a point where she just announced she wasn't going to make any more friends because either her friends kept moving away or she left. We had a tape recorder and we had a lot of taped stories, and she reached a point where she spent a lot of time listening to those stories, and I think maybe did feel, in fact, that the rug was being pulled out from under her on repeated occasions. Not that, to tell you the truth, I think it's had any long-term impact because she has no problem making friends and certainly enjoys life and, looking back on it, enjoyed the Foreign Service. But I think it could have an impact on a child if that's very, very important to them.

Q: Going back to the Canberra experience for your daughter, her comment on how women were not treated as equal as men...

FORBORD: She felt not taken seriously. I think, certainly, in Australia... You know, Australia is a very democratic society and in anything legal, women are definitely treated as equals. But there is a tradition in Australia. It is very much, I would say, a male

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dominated society. It goes back to the first Australians who came, and matesmanship, and the fact that men's closest friends were all men. I think to this day, the women are not treated as seriously or taken as seriously.

Q: And it was a rough country, of course, when they first went there.

FORBORD: Exactly. And there weren't women at first. It was just men. And they developed this very close attachment to each other.

Q: Now my question actually is, if as a mother you find that you are in the culture where the values are different than the U.S. The things that you would want to enforce are not there in that foreign culture, how would you go about reinforcing those qualities for your daughter, for example - not just your daughter, your son as well - such as independence?

FORBORD: Well let me just make one comment first of all which I had not planned to talk about, but since you brought it up, I think it might be interesting to note. In the case of Australia, we made the decision to return to the United States for very much that reason.

Q: Is that right? I was wondering why you were only there for one year.

FORBORD: Yes, that's why. It was an assignment that came up sort of overnight. We went without much investigation. Our kids were in high school. We got there and found, first of all, that the educational opportunities were extremely limited for them. They had been in wonderful schools here and I think that both of us just felt that it wasn't right. This was too important a time in our children's lives for us to uproot them, take them and put them in a system that really encouraged values that we totally disagreed with. We felt that it was a time when kids make a lot of the decisions that will affect them for the rest of their lives, and form a lot of their image of themselves. And for us it was just not right. Things that they were exposed to as normal and acceptable were not acceptable to us, and we made the decision to leave. We broke the assignment, basically, because we felt it was just not worth it.

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Q: I'm just thinking of how easily that can be done.

FORBORD: Not easily.

Q: I imagine it was very difficult.

FORBORD: It was very difficult. It was very difficult. In fact, the fortunate thing was that a job opportunity came up for my husband. The State Department happened to need at that moment a skill that he had. If it hadn't been for that, we could not have left, at least not easily. But we made the decision that I would go anyway with the kids because we considered that it was just too risky, basically.

Both of us felt very strongly that children needed to feel some sort of encouragement, particularly in the field of education. That they needed to be encouraged and know that education was one of the most important things in their lives. And in Australia, it's not. Education is not very important. In fact, intellectualism in Australia is frowned upon. It's looked upon as being kind of silly almost. And for us it was just shocking. I wasn't at all prepared for it. You'd think with all the time we've been in the Foreign Service, of all cultures, that Australia would be the easiest, but for us it was the most difficult. It was the first time I had really, really felt that I knew, I think, what American values were, and the first time I realized how important it was to me that our children have a sense of what it means to be an American.

I think one of those is that there's a real admiration, I think, for making yourself better. I'm not trying to condemn Australian society because I think there are a lot of things that are wonderful about it. But that was one characteristic that to me, I just did not want to see my children grow up with the belief that that was okay because I didn't think it was okay. And basically they didn't think it was okay either, but they thought it was kind of nice and easy.

Q: Very, very interesting. I guess I'm taken by surprise here.

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FORBORD: Well, I was taken by surprise, too, I'll tell you. I was absolutely knocked off my feet. I couldn't believe it. And I found that I reacted to it so much more strongly than I ever would have imagined. I found that it just meant so much more to me than I ever could have thought. So we came back.

Q: Perhaps something similar happens to other families. I'm just making this up in a way, from what I've heard, but perhaps often the children get sent to boarding school?

FORBORD: Yes. That's an option. But again, we figured we have our children such a short time. It made no sense to us. It was like all of the sudden, overnight, here we were faced with this decision of sending our kids away. We didn't want to send them away.

Q: And you shouldn't have to.

FORBORD: Yes. So we figured, at this point, maybe it's very, very bad for the career, but so what? It almost reached that point that we really didn't care anymore. We knew that this was the most important thing to us. But fortunately for us it worked out all right. We were just very, very lucky that it did.

Q: That's wonderful.

FORBORD: Because it might not have.

Q: I'm looking at you now. We're sitting in your office on the floor of FSI and you currently are training a officer for the political training division. I thought you could tell me a little bit about what courses you're running now, and a little bit about training officers.

FORBORD: Well, I'm running Negotiations: Art and Skills, and that's a five-day program for anybody in the Foreign Service. Not just in the Foreign Service, anybody in the U.S. Government who is going to be involved in negotiations. That's really for mid-level people. I do a course on multi-lateral diplomacy which assists people in preparing for an

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assignment with a multi-lateral organization or going out on a delegation. Many offices at State, particularly, have people who are active in negotiations with organizations even though they're stationed here. We also have people, of course, again from all different agencies who come to that, too.

Then I do a course on politico-military affairs which is an introduction/orientation for that bureau, really. People who are going to be working in that bureau or overseas as political-military officers. And I do a course on arms control which is pretty much, I would say, a survey of current thought and the department's position on arms control.

And then, scattered throughout the year, I do a lot of pieces on U.S. representation abroad, diplomatic skills and protocol. And also other sessions as they arise. I do one now, too, which is really fun, on orientation for new people going to the U.N. in September.

Q: Obviously these officer training courses focus more on the professional aspects and skills and all that. Just in general, how do you find, or do you find, any differences in doing this kind of training for the officers and doing the other training that you have been doing for spouses and families?

FORBORD: Well, I think the major difference is that much of this work is very substantive work. It's training, but a lot of it is orientation rather than training. What you try to do is to structure the orientation in a way that involves training with it. Then I think it becomes much more successful. But you are very, very interested in these courses in the knowledge that people can acquire, except in the case of negotiations.

The negotiations course is more in a sense like the other courses in that it's really teaching people skills and helping to change attitudes around the negotiation process. Most of the courses that I've done previously were courses that really did involve attitude changes, which is probably the most difficult of all kinds of training. I think changing attitudes is

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very, very difficult, and there's always a question of how much of that you can actually accomplish.

Q: What do you mean by a change of attitudes? From what kind of attitudes to what kind of attitudes?

FORBORD: Well, just for an example, I think around the area of community building. People who maybe believe that the best way to operate in a foreign environment is to go and get yourself fixed up in the American compound because it may be the safest, it may be the most secure. Your needs may be taken care of. When you try to change attitudes through teaching about community dynamics and community building, you try to help people understand that by reaching out and trying to go beyond that very, very fixed community, their life would be different.

And not necessarily better. For some it would be, for some it might not. But it would be different. And you try to challenge people to at least try to reach out and go to other elements of the community and broaden the community, and by doing that, the whole community will be much healthier and better off. So that's just an example of an attitude you try to change. And it's very difficult to do that, and you never know for sure if you've accomplished it.

Q: But it's different for the officer training.

FORBORD: Yes. The officer training, except in the area of negotiations, which I would say involves a lot of change around attitude because, when people come to the negotiations course, they generally have a pretty fixed idea in their mind of what works in terms of dealing with other people, and particularly in getting what they want out of a negotiation. And by the end of the course, hopefully, you have changed that attitude, or they have changed their attitudes toward negotiation. You try to show them there's a different approach that probably will work better for them. And if they try that in the class and it

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works for them, then they go away with a different attitude about how to approach people in a negotiation.

Q: Now when you do the training for a family, obviously your experiences overseas contribute a lot to how well you can run the training. Now, just in general terms, would your Foreign Service experiences help with the training of the officers?

FORBORD: Oh, yes.

Q: Knowing who they are? Is that part of it?

FORBORD: I think so. You know, I've always - or not always, but very often - worked in an embassy overseas. And I've had a lot of opportunity because of that to really get to know how an embassy works and understand some of the concerns and the problems of being an officer. Many, many times I've had as much contact with officers as I have with people who are not officers just because of the fact that, working in the embassy, that's often the way it is. And I've had an opportunity to work with them on different projects and things of that sort. And I think because of that, I've gotten to know a lot about what Foreign Service officers need to learn in order to be effective. And I've really been exposed to the running of an embassy operation. And I think that way it seemed to me that it was fairly natural to come into this kind of work because I have had the chance for years to work in an embassy situation.

Q: Well, it sounds like more spouses should be hired to train officers.

FORBORD: I think that a lot of spouses certainly could do this kind of work and could do it extremely well. I think that sometimes they don't think of themselves as knowing all of that because, I don't know, I guess maybe they just don't realize that the time spent in the embassy, that you really are doing very much the same work that the officers are doing, very often. But I think often spouses don't realize that in fact they can do the work.

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Sometimes they may even be able to teach it better, because often they've been observers of what people do, and sometimes that makes you even better at teaching. If you've had an opportunity to observe, to watch how people react, watch how they do well, to watch what they do well, you can put that altogether and put it into some kind of training.

Q: And how do the officers see that, namely your 25 of experience in the Foreign Service? Do they see you as a spouse in training, or a trainer who happened to be a spouse who sort of... Which way do you think it is?

FORBORD: I don't know, Monique, because I've never really asked them, but I think maybe...

I think - again this goes back to this job business - I think it's interesting. I think in this job they view me more as a colleague. I think maybe in the OBC they viewed me more as a spouse because that seemed to be the focus since we're training so many spouses. We wanted spouses to feel very comfortable with us and know that we were spouses.

But I think in this job, what I'm doing really does relate to what it means to be an officer and I think that therefore they probably view me much more as a person who's had experience and knows how to put that experience into a training program that meets their interests and needs. I'm not even sure if they think one way or the other if I'm a spouse or not.

Q: I just wondered whether they ever thought, oh with the 25 years of Foreign Service experience, it's a plus to the training.

FORBORD: It would be interesting to know that. I think probably in the area of representational skills, they would think that. Definitely. In fact I think that's pretty much the reaction I get. I don't know in the other areas if that would be their reaction. They may think, since I have not been an officer, that I would not have had direct experience. I just don't know. I've never really, even in my biographic information, I never really explained

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to them where I got the exposure to what it was like working in an embassy and learning about some of those skills they need.

Q: So there was never, at least in your experience, it never came into question that, doubting your...

FORBORD: It has come into question, I think, in that, again, I think, there is a reluctance to take seriously, totally seriously, the training of spouses. That it's appropriate for officers as well. I think there is a reluctance there. I think it's a completely inappropriate reluctance, but I think it is there. And I have seen it. Well, just to give you an example in terms of this job, people have said to me, "Oh, now you've got a real job," which is amazing to me.

Q: Now you're in the arena with the officers, in other words.

FORBORD: Yes. And therefore that makes it more legitimate, which is what I was saying initially, in the world of the bureaucracy, the spouse is always on the outside. And so it's natural that that would be reflected in the environment that trains officers as well. Hopefully it's becoming less that way.

Q: I hope so!

FORBORD: Yes, hopefully. But I don't know. I think it's very hard for a bureaucracy to incorporate the talents of spouses. In fact, I think with this whole new possibility for work for spouses in the embassy. I think it will be very interesting to see how the embassy chooses to recognize the talents of the pool of spouses who may be interested in getting jobs in the embassy.

Q: Yes, I'm going to get to that in just a moment. Just before, one question. In your perspective, how have the officers changed to you? Say with your experience overseas, and now you're seeing new people coming in. You obviously trained A-100 as well. Have you developed any sort of picture of how they're different over the years?

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FORBORD: Well I think one thing, we now see a lot more women. When we first joined the Foreign Service, there were very few women, and if a woman married, she had to resign. So certainly one major area is that there are many more women now. The other thing I've noticed now that I've dealt with so many different classes of incoming officers is that there is tremendous difference in the different classes. Tremendous difference.

Q: How so?

FORBORD: Well the personalities, I would say, of the classes now tend to be unpredictable.

Q: Is that right?

FORBORD: Yes, it seems to me. For instance, I worked with a class today that seemed to be much more almost in the mode of the old - not old, but ten years ago - what I might have experienced.

Q: More traditional?

FORBORD: More lawyer-oriented. Much more sort of a thinking type of culture. Thinking, not in the terms of thinking - everybody thinks - but in terms of perhaps not as interested in the people angle of diplomatic work.

Q: More introspective perhaps?

FORBORD: More critical, I would say, than some of the more recent classes I've seen, which seem to not be as critical. Maybe questioning, but not critical. There is a certain characteristic of many Foreign Service officers, and has been for a long, long time, of being extremely critical in their thinking.

Q: Of other people, of themselves?

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FORBORD: No, just the way they think. They're always looking at the issue and wondering what's wrong with it or how it could be improved, or how I'm going to deal with this. You know, give me this information and let me work around it for a long time, and then I'll let you know what I think about it. The more recent classes that I have seen have not been that way. They've been more spontaneous, I would say, more questioning in the sense of almost more humanistic in their approach. And I thought maybe that was a reflection of a real effort to diversify more the body of officers coming in. It could be the fact there's more women coming in. That changes things sometimes.

Q: Yes, I heard that there was an effort, probably still is an effort, to reach out to other parts of America and other parts of the United States, to other states. What I've heard is that they used to be mostly from the eastern states, from certain schools and so on. Is that your impression?

FORBORD: I think it's very true. When we first came in, I think we were just beginning to see sort of a turn away from kind of Eastern Establishment. You began to see people coming from other parts of the country, and I think that's much more the case now. I think it's a real diverse group. Except what I notice that's really interesting to me is that it's not diverse in terms of minority representation. It amazes me, and the only thing I can figure is that perhaps minority candidates have other options because I'm always astounded that, after all these years, we still have such a low representation of minority groups.

Q: Are you referring to blacks in particular?

FORBORD: Well, blacks, Hispanics, Asians. It's just a very, very small representation and it really amazes me. Because I know that there is a desire on the part of the Foreign Service to do this and it's reflected in women, certainly. There are so many more women than there used to be. Still not fifty percent, though. Still probably thirty percent. But in other areas, not as many as I would hope to see for a real representative group. And I think we need that.

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I think that the skills that are required are not the same skills that were required thirty years ago. I think they're very different. I think we need many more people skills now than we ever have before. Maybe we needed them before, too. I don't know. But I think now we need much, much more of that.

Q: And the addition of more women coming into the Service and having representation from other states. How do you think that's going to change the composition of the Foreign Service?

FORBORD: You mean the composition in terms of the atmosphere?

Q: The atmosphere, the flavor.

FORBORD: I think it's going to be different, and I think it's going to improve things. I think we need more women. Maybe this sounds very sexist, but I think women naturally have, perhaps, or have been encouraged to develop diplomatic skills more than men. I think it's easier for them. I think that women naturally tend to move into negotiation more easily than men. And maybe it goes back to this childhood business we were talking about earlier where women negotiate with each other all the time from the time they're little kids.

Q: You're quite right.

FORBORD: Yes, they do it. So it's a natural for them. And I think that we need a lot of that. We need much more than we've had, perhaps. And I think we're going to need more, the way the world's changing. This is another area that's really interesting to me, and the criticisms that I hear from the older school. I hear that there's criticism because the new officers are not as dedicated to their work as the older officers were there. To me this is a very healthy thing.

I believe in dedication to your job, but dedication to a career, I think, can have some drawbacks. I think in the area of what you strive for, it may be very different. If a person

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is striving to be number one in his career, how he performs may be very reflective of his superior's desires. And what I see from people who are not so career-oriented. You know, they're very competent and they want to do a fine job, but maybe they don't see the Foreign Service as a career forever. They're not so inclined to always give the response that the supervisor wants. I think they may be more interested, at times, in changing the perspective on an issue. And I think that's very healthy. But I think there is talk that that's a problem in the Foreign Service.

Q: Now you mentioned already that, as we have more women officers, we're going to see more male spouses. Could you tell me a little bit more about how you see that? I don't know quite how to put it, but just having male spouses and also, obviously, women are going to have to find partners also, and if they are devoted to a career in the Foreign Service, are they all going to end up marrying Foreign Service officers?

FORBORD: Interesting question. I think, first of all, male spouses in the Foreign Service is a very healthy thing. I think that males in our society are used to getting what they want and I think you're going to see a much more active fight for employment, for example, when there's male spouses who are concerned about getting jobs than you've seen from female spouses. Again, not because we don't want jobs, but we are not used to tearing down the palace gates, and men are. Men go in and if things aren't the way they want, they change them.

And I don't think we have been that aggressive. I think we're going to see spouses' needs certainly made more readily apparent because of that. I think we're already seeing some of that. I think that perhaps women who are in the Foreign Service... I think that some women, just like some men, decide that that's what they want to do with their lives. They want to make it a career. And marriage may be peripheral to that decision. They may decide that, to them, a family and marriage are not important. The most important thing for them is their career. There are men who have decided the same thing. And I'm not sure with women if it's going to be much more different than it is with men in terms of numbers.

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I don't know as far as marrying other Foreign Service people. It's complicated. It's complicated for anybody who is that devoted to her career to marry another person in the same career because one of those members is going to have to sacrifice, because the tandem system does not work splendidly, brilliantly. It just doesn't. And I think with that as a given, it's going to be hard for two very career-oriented, very achievement-oriented individuals to find if that works real well for them. If you don't have that situation. If you have a situation where one is very willing to take jobs as they come, then I think it's work beautifully, if that's the case.

Q: How many tandem couples have you seen in your Foreign Service career? Just roughly, five, ten, fifteen?

FORBORD: I'm just trying to think. At least ten, I would say.

Q: I just wanted to get some sense of what numbers we're talking about, that's all.

FORBORD: I don't know. There are actually figures on exactly how many there are now. There's quite a few. But I've only encountered, I guess, about ten. And the interesting thing to me is that almost invariably there was some problem as a result.

Q: Is that right?

FORBORD: Yes. It's built into the system. And again, that's not to discourage people from becoming tandems, but I can think of only one case where it seems to have worked extremely smoothly. And in that case both parties had felt very comfortable with taking a job that was not perhaps career-enhancing, but gave them a good school for their kids, a place they wanted to live, and both a decent job. I think both of them early on decided their priorities were things rather than career-enhancement.

Q: What I'm wondering now is the relationship between officers and spouses. How they treat each other overseas, especially overseas at the mission, because you're there

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together in the same place much more so than when you're back here in Washington, DC. Would you tell me a little bit more about that? In your experience, the statuses of officers and spouses and how they relate to each other in general or in some specific situations?

FORBORD: Well, I think that basically spouses have been treated as somewhat second-class citizens. I think, in a way, they have been looked upon as being just a cut above the children. (laughs) I mean that sounds really dreadful and many people may disagree with me, but I've viewed this for a number of years and I've talked to a lot of people and I've heard a lot of comments that maybe people didn't want me to hear. And I think that, unfortunately, there is a condescending attitude toward spouses. Even toward professional spouses.

Q: Coming from the officers?

FORBORD: Coming from the officers. I think they are viewed as interference to a certain degree. You know, spouses when they go overseas are left with a lot of the administrative work. Many spouses do most of the administrative work. I've never done that because I've always felt that was a loser. There was no way I could ever win with that one, so I've stayed out of it. My husband was moving me around, and my feeling was, since he was doing that, it was his job to set all the administrative parts. Except for one occasion when I got very involved and it was not good.

And it isn't good. It's a mess. Many spouses handle all of the administrative stuff and the administrative section doesn't like to see them coming because they know they're going to bring with them problems. More questions, more demands. If it comes from an officer, there's a different attitude. It's very interesting.

Q: Now you're talking about things regarding the household or getting an ID? That sort of administrative?

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FORBORD: Yes. The general administrative details that have to be handled. When they're handled by the officer, it's viewed as part of the job. Often when it's the spouse it's viewed as interference.

Q: And complaints.

FORBORD: And complaints. It's very difficult because, as I said, the spouse is left with so much of this and also with the desire to get things right, to get things in order, whether it's with the children, with the transportation, whatever. You get very frustrated sometimes as a spouse when you can't get your housing lined up, or whatever. And when you feel like there's no support coming to you from the embassy, it's very frustrating. And if you go and start complaining about it, then you get labeled as a complainer. So it's hard.

Q: Yes, sounds terrible, actually. Let's focus a little bit on how women officers relate to women spouses. I'm thinking that probably in your experience, again, you encountered more women spouses than male spouses. How do you think they relate to each other?

FORBORD: I think, unfortunately, a lot of that opinion they have adopted as well.

Q: That's what I was afraid of.

FORBORD: Just as an example, a recent comment that I heard in one of my presentations on protocol and representation abroad from an officer was that she was concerned about dressing up for cocktail parties because she didn't want to be mistaken for a spouse. And I think, unfortunately, there is that sense that spouses are not official members of the community. And people wouldn't want to be mistaken for somebody who's not official and doesn't have any power or responsibility.

Q: Because she was talking about being mistaken as a spouse by outside people. And so what we're saying is that the attitude on spouses extends outside the American mission.

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FORBORD: That's right. That they are perhaps peripheral. I think that the place that we miss out here is that spouses do play a very large part in influencing their employee spouse. Other societies know that and they go a long ways, I think, toward educating their spouses, to making sure that even they're paid at times, so that they will attend functions. Because they know how important the spouses can be in facilitating dialogue with the people who work in the embassy. There's absolutely no question about it.

But I don't think that people have ever really recognized that with our spouses. Now maybe that's not true. Maybe going back to the olden days... It's interesting because I think spouses from the olden days, meaning olden days like when my husband and I started in the Foreign Service. I think going back that far, if you'd asked spouses, they would have felt they had a very, very important role to play. And in fact when the '72 Directive came out, many of them were very resentful because they felt their role was so important. So it may have been over the last ten to fifteen years that the attitude toward spouses had become... you know, the role is much less clearly defined. And it may be that this is where this attitude is developing. I don't know. It's a very interesting question to me.

Q: I'm still very unsettled with this question regarding how women officers treat women spouses. That just sounds very discouraging to me.

FORBORD: Well, I don't think it's everybody. I don't think it's everybody, but I have to say that generally speaking, I think it is true. I'd kind of like to ask the officers themselves. There are a number of spouses who have been spouses who are joining the Foreign Service. I know some of the people who have done this, and even their attitude, in many cases, changes.

Q: They now look at themselves as more an officer.

FORBORD: Yes. It's fascinating.

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Q: I have experienced that, too.

FORBORD: So I think it's a problem. And this is a place where, if you had a certain type of training, you might be able to change the attitudes of officers. That would be a wonderful accomplishment if you could do that, I think.

Q: Since we're on the subject of the mission overseas, how about the question of how the status of a spouse changes as the officer moves up the rank?

FORBORD: How that changes.

Q: Yes. How does that change for the spouse, and also how does that change for other people, perhaps, looking at you?

FORBORD: Right. It's really an interesting question, Monique. I'm very interested in the psychology of that and in fact, at some point, I would really like to study that because it really fascinates me. Because I've noticed in discussions with spouses I know, there are very different attitudes around this. And I've always got this little tape recorder going in my head that picks up different comments because I think it's just fascinating to see.

There are obviously a number of spouses that view themselves as part and parcel of the officer. And in that case I think they are extremely sensitive to the career advancement because for them, the advancement reflects on them. If their officer husband or wife gets a promotion, they get the promotion as well. This never struck me, to tell you truth, until I started working at the OBC. I never realized this. Because I have never felt that. I have never felt - for some reason - I don't know why it is - but I had never felt that my husband's success or lack of success had anything to do with me in any way. I always felt like I was very fortunate to be able to go along for the ride in all of this, that it was a great opportunity, that I learned a lot. But I never felt that anything that he did had anything to do with me.

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Q: Even before the '72 Directive?

FORBORD: Yes, even before. I didn't understand all this. I don't know. I think that I was very naive coming into the Foreign Service. I had lived in a family where status was never discussed. It was just not an issue at all.

Q: You are you and that's it.

FORBORD: Yes. And I didn't realize that people had all these issues around status. I had just never been exposed to that or never thought about it. So it never occurred to me, even prior to '72, I couldn't even understand what the big stink was. I didn't understand this, really, why a person would care one way or another. I didn't see why they'd want to talk about me in my husband's EER. On the other hand, I couldn't see, when it was gone, what difference that made either. So I was kind of out in left field. It's weird.

Q: That's interesting.

FORBORD: Yes, it's really interesting that I was. It really wasn't until I started working at the OBC that I had any consciousness of any of this. When I started hearing people discussing work and status and all that stuff. And so I have to say that up until I went to Argentina, I really was not conscious whether anybody in any way treated me differently or the same or not as well as I should have been treated, or whatever, because of our rank. Because to me that was immaterial.

Q: But your husband was DCM (deputy chief of mission) in Argentina.

FORBORD: Yes, so it wasn't until we went there, after I'd been at the OBC, that I began to think a little bit about this. Because I heard so many people's comments, you know? And I began to think that I guessed it was a pretty important deal, after all, if that happened.

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And that concerned me, too, because I wasn't sure whether I liked having any sort of additional expectation around me. I guess that basically I don't like people to have expectations of me that I haven't established for myself. So that was my inclination I was going to have to somehow, at least in my head, realize that I would arrive and people would have certain expectations of me. So the OBC was a big help in that in that they were training people to be DCMs and DCMs' spouses. So I realized there was an issue here that I had to deal with.

Q: So you were training yourself then? (laughs)

FORBORD: Yes, I started sort of training myself and thinking, "Well, gosh, what will they expect?" and all that business. And again I think I'm probably not very good at this because I find it very difficult to know in advance what other people's expectations are going to be. I think that it's hard to ever set that up. Because once you start setting that up, then you start putting yourself in a certain category to fulfill the expectations that you have established yourself.

So I think my decision was to go there, basically, and see what was up and what was needed, and that's pretty much what I did. And I think that looking back on it, people did expect certain things of me. People did make friends with me because of who my husband was in some cases. That's true. That happens. And I know now that that kind of thing happens. But that's life, that's the way it is, and I think you again just have to roll with the punches on that and realize that that's the way it is.

And a lot of good comes out of that, too, and you just have to appreciate the good that comes out of it and disregard the other part. Particularly if people are making friends with you only because they think that your husband is in a particular position, that your spouse is something special. I would have to say it definitely bothered me to think that I was expected to perform in a way different from what I had ever been expected to perform before.

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Q: You mentioned not liking the expectations that other people put onto you.

FORBORD: It's not so much, Monique, that I don't like it. I realize that's human nature. It's not that. I guess what I really don't like is when I establish my agenda based on other people's expectations. I understand everybody has expectations, but I think when you start planning your life according to other people's expectations, you get into a trap. That's something that I hope I never do. So I guess in that sense, it's helpful to know what the expectations might be, but I think you also always have to be open because you might be wrong about what people really expect and how you can do the most. I think that you have to decide for yourself how you can do the most good wherever you are. And it may have nothing to do with anybody's expectations but your own.

Q: That's true. How about comparing for me for a moment here your experience as the DCM's wife in Buenos Aires, Argentina and your experience at your first post when your husband first started in Gabon.

FORBORD: Oh, in Gabon, yes. Well, again, this is interesting to me because I went out to Gabon not knowing anything about the Foreign Service, not caring anything about the Foreign Service.

Q: You were newly married.

FORBORD: Newly married. We'd just been married two weeks. My only knowledge of the Foreign Service was from two people I'd met on a train traveling from Munich to Stuttgart who were in the Foreign Service - this was back in 1960, I think - and I thought it was the Foreign Legion for all I knew. I had no concept. We had never known anybody who had worked for the government. My father was an adamant businessman and thought very lowly of the government, had never known anybody who worked for the government, had never had any interest in knowing anybody who worked for the government, and couldn't believe I'd marry somebody who worked for the government!

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So when I went out, I thought, "Well, that's okay. I don't care. Government sounds okay to me. We're going to travel around and have a good time." So I went out really not having the foggiest idea of what the Foreign Service even meant. And I think in a way that was really great because...

Q: Do you think that was typical of other couples?

FORBORD: I don't think so. That's the funny thing, Monique, I really don't think so. I don't know, maybe California in those days was just really remote. (laughter) Washington was so far away, people didn't talk about Washington. They weren't interested in politics, even, much in those days. And the Foreign Service was the last thing anybody thought about.

My parents traveled a lot and we traveled a lot, but I never thought in terms of people joining a government agency and traveling around with that government agency. It never even occurred to me that anyone would do that. So I didn't know anything about it. I just knew that we were going to go to Gabon when we got married, and that would be great. I think my husband tried to explain it to me a little bit, but I really wasn't too interested in learning about it. But we got there and I got a job in the embassy almost immediately. A wonderful job.

Q: What were you doing?

FORBORD: I was representative for the African-American Institute.

Q: Oh, that's right.

FORBORD: Yes. So I think I almost immediately got a very different perspective, maybe from other people because I was immersed in the business of the embassy, trying to do things with a foreign government.

Q: So you were lucky.

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FORBORD: I was so fortunate. I think for me it helped me create an idea of the possibilities in the Foreign Service that maybe some people didn't have. When I first went, there were a lot of unhappy people, a lot of spouses who did nothing but drink tea all day. That was okay, but I was just fortunate that I happened to get this wonderful job.

Q: But as a young spouse, how were you perceived? Do you remember anything specific that struck you one way or another?

FORBORD: I'll tell you one thing was, we had a really wonderful ambassador. He was very old school in a way in that he was very formal.

Q: What was his name?

FORBORD: Baine, David Baine. But a real gentleman, first class gentleman, and regarded everybody with the utmost respect. And so I think it never occurred to me that I was a little underling spouse because he never treated anybody like that. Everybody was important to him. And his wife as well. She never put anybody down, never announced any requirements of anybody. Never expected anybody to do anything they didn't want to. So I think that they were unique in that regard.

In fact, the embassy had a boat that supposedly we were supposed to use for evacuation. And we had a beach house eleven miles on the other side of the estuary. Well, the boat just happened to be for water-skiing and the estuary just happened to be like glass most of the time. It was perfect for water-skiing. And the beach house was located on this gorgeous white sand beach. It was perfect. And the ambassador would ask different people to go over across on the estuary every weekend with him and rotate it so that everybody had a chance all the time to do it. So I think that my experience was really unique. It was really wonderful.

Q: So you got to do it, too? Even on your first tour?

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FORBORD: Sure, we did it all the time. He would call up Sunday morning and say, "This is David and would you like to go with us over to spend the day at the other side?" So we'd all go water-skiing together and have a wonderful time. There was never any discussion of people's rank or anything else. That just never entered into it.

Q: So you weren't conscious of that at all?

FORBORD: No, I wasn't conscious of it at all.

Q: Now how was it in Argentina, looking from the DCM position?

FORBORD: Well, I think certainly as far as we were concerned it was again not an issue at all. I certainly think that for myself and for my husband, we are not concerned in any way about rank except that we want to make sure that people who are in the embassy all feel included as best we can. We're not people, I think, who are real interested in doing a whole lot of socializing in a big group. We love one on one, small dinners and things like that, but we don't like a lot of big functions where we have to entertain a lot of people. And I certainly think that we are not in any way conscious at all or interested in rank except as it applies to protocol where you have to consider it.

Q: Right. But there's a certain amount of probably fairness that you and husband have to be sure to exercise because you have certain authority and responsibility.

FORBORD: That's true. And I think that's very difficult. I think it requires, for one thing, a real commitment from the ambassador you're working with to make sure that you can carry that out. It's really important.

Q: Well, since you mentioned about ambassadors and I'm just recalling that you are involved with training ambassadors and DCMs a little bit. Am I correct?

FORBORD: No, not really. Not in this job.

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Q: Through OBC?

FORBORD: Well, when I was at OBC I did. But that's been 1990, I guess, was the last time I did any of that. Although I did do a program on a contract before I was hired for this position here when I came back from Argentina. I did a program for DCMs on protocol and representation.

Q: Other than protocol and representation, what are the major points of training ambassadors' wives or spouses as well as DCMs and DCMs' spouses?

FORBORD: Well I think there's very set programs for the ambassadors and I think it's a very good program. What they do is they bring them in and they have a two-week program. They have pretty much delineated the things that they feel are the most important for ambassadors to know. They mix up the career people with the non-career, and that's intentional so that the non-career get a chance to hear from the career people.

What they try to do is introduce everybody to the way an embassy operates. How it's different being head of the mission from being in any other job in the mission. How the chief of mission is responsible and relates to all the other elements in the embassy. You've got all these other agencies now that have representatives. The military, DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency,) AID. It's just so huge now, very complex. They talk a lot about that.

They do quite a bit about work with the press, spending time here at FSI and assisting people in making speeches, and how they handle the press, how they relate to it. They introduce them to various agencies around the city: the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and other agencies that may relate to the work that they do overseas.

For the spouses, they take them for a two-day program and on that they talk a lot about the expectations and ambassadors' spouses setting their own agendas and how they go about that and their relation to people in the mission. And they talk about representation,

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the responsibilities they have, and how they go about doing all the accounts, all the administrative work connected with that.

The DCMs have a two-week program as well. Half of that is off-site and they discuss what it means to work for a chief of mission and, I think, do a lot of work around team-building which is very important, and their work as supervisors particularly in helping the junior officers in the embassy to make sure that they're getting career advice and that kind of thing. And they do some things with the spouses. They do Myers-Briggs [personality tests], for example, and a little bit around representational functions, again about expectations.

Q: I just thought of one question regarding again spouses whose spouses are the officers in the higher level, more senior positions. If those spouses are to work in the embassy, does that present a problem?

FORBORD: I think it presents real problems, particularly for some jobs. And particularly when jobs are limited. Yes, I think it can. There are certain regulations, for example, that require a spouse not to be supervised by a spouse. In other words, if I were going to be CLO and my husband were administrative officer, he could not supervise me. It would be probably not a good idea to even think of doing that. I think as the spouse of a DCM it's difficult.

Q: So you didn't work in Argentina?

FORBORD: I didn't. But I wasn't there very long either because my husband went ahead of me. Since we had a senior in high school, I stayed with her to graduate. I think eventually I probably would have found something to do, but probably outside the embassy. I would have felt much more comfortable with that. And I think for an ambassador's spouse it's extremely difficult.

Q: It seems like reverse discrimination in a way.

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FORBORD: It does, Monique, but a lot of it, I think, would be choice. I think if I had been working in the embassy I might have felt like everything was so intensified, everything being right there. I don't know. It's a difficult question. Again, it depends on the kind of work that would come up.

Q: Do you think that actually a DCM's spouse or an ambassador's spouse have time to have a career?

FORBORD: I think that they can make time for themselves. Again, remember, they're not employees. It's up to them. I think if they perceive themselves as being welded to their employee spouse... I don't mean to sound... Maybe it sounds like I'm berating that. I'm not. I think that some spouses view one career as enough and they're perfectly happy to promote that career in any way that they can. Other people are not as happy doing that. If you're not happy doing that, I think it would be very hard to do only the job of enhancement of the employee's job.

Q: It's not fulfilling for the spouse.

FORBORD: Well, for some people it is. It depends on the person. Some people are extremely fulfilled by it. I have friends who think it's just the most wonderful thing in the world and I think it's great if they get that much satisfaction out of it. And if they decide to do that, it can become a full-time job. You can spend your time organizing really important functions, making sure that everything's perfect. On the other hand, you also have a staff to do that, and if your staff is good and you're fortunate, you may be able to use your staff to do that.

There's a lot of wonderful things that a spouse can do in terms of volunteer work in the community because of the contacts you have. You may have entr#s that you wouldn't have otherwise. And I would see, if I were in that position, I think maybe what I would look

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for would be something like that. I think there would be fantastic opportunities for you to do work in the community.

Q: Let's focus for a little while on the topic of representation and protocol here, Nancy, since you do ongoing training in this area. Two questions. One is, again get back to the question of having a lot of male spouses. How does that affect the representation responsibility? And the other is just, what is the single most important thing that you want to get across to Foreign Service families on the topic of protocol and representation?

FORBORD: Well, first of all, I would say as far as the male spouses, I think you need to sit down and clarify in your own mind whose responsibility it is. I think it's the responsibility of the employee to represent the U.S. abroad. I think that is the job. And as an employee, I think you have to decide how best to do that. If you determine the best way to do that is through building relationships at post with people of the host government, other diplomats, members of your own mission, then I think you're going to have to have to decide probably that you need to do some representational entertaining in order to promote that.

At that point, it seems to me that if your spouse is interested in assisting you in that, there's a lot to be helped with and it's great if you've got a spouse who wants to do that because you probably can do a lot better job if you have two hands instead of one. I don't think it matters if it's a male or a female. If the male spouse is anxious to assist, it can be just as successful. There are a lot of male spouses who have wonderful social skills and like to cook, like to entertain, and can do all that.

If neither one of you likes to do it, you might want to hire somebody to do it. If you look at the Queen of England, the Queen of England doesn't do these parties herself, she hires somebody to plan these wonderful parties. We seem to have a reluctance to realize that we can, if we want to, hire somebody to assist us with that. And I think that's the reality if you choose to work instead of putting time into those things, you may want to consider that you want someone to assist you. And people can do that. I know many single

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ambassadors do that. They hire a person who acts like sort of a social organizer and organizes things like that for them, and it's a wonderful system.

Q: But doesn't that bring up the question that spouses are doing things and they're not getting paid, and then when the ambassador hires somebody, the person is getting paid.

FORBORD: Well they are, they are. It's true. But I think, you see, it's the spouse's choice. The spouse doesn't have to do that. Nobody says, "You're the spouse. Therefore we're going to expect a lot more of your spouse employee because he or she's got you there."

Q: So one important point that you want to get across is that it is the responsibility of the employee to entertain.

FORBORD: Exactly. I think it is. I think it's the responsibility of the employee. I believe, since that employee agrees to represent the U.S. government and agrees to basically promote socialization and promote relationship-building abroad, that I think it is the job of the employee. Just like if that employee were hired by a company to go over and promote the sale of a product, you can't do that sitting in your office. It's not going to sell.

And I think that sometimes Foreign Service officers, because they are so interested in the issues, get very involved in that aspect, almost the academic type work, and forget that a lot of what they do has to do with people. And it's not to say that you have to go out and entertain elegantly or formally or anything. But you need to get out and meet people, however best you can do that.

Q: Do you think the officers are gradually getting the message?

FORBORD: I hope. (laughter) I give them that message. I think they are. I think they are.

Q: Is there a difference in view between women officers and men officers in this regard?

FORBORD: It's very interesting. A lot of the questions that I get from the women officers regard how many fancy things they should take with them. They've got them, they say.

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They like to entertain. "And how much should I take with me?" And I don't generally hear that from the men.

Q: What do they say?

FORBORD: They don't say much. (laughs) Or they say they'd like to bring their spouse along to hear this presentation. Very often they say that. So I think they assume that it's the women's job.

Q: It's the women's job.

FORBORD: But not all of them. We had a really interesting discussion, in fact, around dress one day in the class. There was this talk about how fancy a female officer can go to a function and people will still take her seriously, which is interesting to me. And the men, almost to every man there, said that the way the woman dresses, I mean as long as it's not extremely, I guess you would say, extreme, that would have nothing to do with the way they would take her seriously or not.

Q: That's what they say.

FORBORD: But maybe they would, yes. Maybe they would. Who knows? You're right. But they were very surprised that that came up as an issue from the female officers. Very interesting discussion. But I think I would just say that you can have a lot of fun entertaining and meeting people overseas. And I would say rather than entertaining, I would like to say meeting people overseas. I think if a spouse decides that he or she is not going to participate at all, you miss out on a great opportunity to meet people overseas. It's a wonderful way. And people want to meet you. And where else do you go in the world where they really are dying to meet you, you know? It doesn't happen very often. I mean I can go out here and no one cares! (laughter)

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Q: That's true. That could be why people find it very difficult coming back to Washington, DC.

FORBORD: I think that's a lot of it.

Q: You're so anonymous here. Looking at the postings you had it seems regular. You had one overseas post and one DC post. I'm just curious as to how you and your husband decide on your postings. Was it a conscious decision that you want to be back in DC every so often?

FORBORD: No, it really wasn't like that. A lot of it was just circumstance. I think it has been extremely fortunate that we have had it that way. When we were talking about children earlier, I think our children have a great sense of being from Washington, both of our children. If you ask them where they're from, they'll tell anybody they're from Washington. They feel this is home. They feel a great affinity. They definitely feel like they're Americans. There is no question in my children's minds that they're Americans. They love America. They love being an American. They think it's a wonderful advantage. A lot of Foreign Service children don't feel that way. I think a lot of Foreign Service children have not had the opportunity to really experience life in the United States.

Q: Yes, sometimes they were gone for nine years or more.

FORBORD: Forever. Some of them don't come back until they go to college. And our children, I think because we came and went and came and went, there was a certain reliability, too. They saw their friends again and we'd leave and we'd come back and we'd see their friends again. And there was a consistency, I think, that helped them. But that was chance. We really did not plan that. The only plan we had was when we came back from Australia. We really planned that.

Q: Well having done that, experienced that by chance, would you recommend that to...

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FORBORD: I would definitely recommend it, no question.

Q: Try to be back in DC every so often.

FORBORD: I would recommend against, if you have a choice, ever staying out. Many parents do, and I think it's an unfortunate thing. I've talked to so many about this and I don't usually comment on it because I can understand what their thinking is. Many parents find it much easier to have children overseas than in the States.

Q: How so?

FORBORD: Because they don't have the independence they have here. It's different. Overseas they live in a protected community. You can let them do things on their own and not worry about it. They're independent, but not really. They feel like they're independent, but they really aren't. Decisions are made for them, they're taken care of, their needs are met, they live usually in very comfortable circumstances, they often have help in the house. It's really quite a nice lifestyle.

It has been up to now. I don't know if it's going to continue with housing getting smaller and all of that business, but it has been. And the school is small. It's like going to a private school. Parents think they're doing their kids a favor. And I think for the parents it's much easier. I don't think there's any question. It is much easier.

And they will avoid coming back to Washington. They say, "We go back to Washington and we don't have as nice a house. We can't afford to send the kids to private school. They're going to want to drive. They're going to want to get out in that dangerous city and move around. We can't let them do that." So they don't have them come back.

And I think the result of that is they never feel like they belong in the United States. They don't feel like this is home, they don't feel like they can relate to it. They may not have

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developed the independence that they need to have to operate in this society. And I think it's extremely hard on the kids. The ones that I have seen...

It's an interesting thing to me because on the surface they may appear to be sophisticated. They're very appealing to adults because they can be articulate. They can talk to adults. They don't seem to even be interested in a lot of the things other kids are interested in. But I think it takes a great toll on them inside. I really think so.

And I think if you talk to kids who have been through this, they'll tell you that. That coming back to the U.S., particularly if they come back to start college, is so hard on them. They never feel like they belong. That's why you've got this group like the Global Nomads who get together and they talk because they've never felt like they belong. And it's not to say they don't offer other things to society, but I think it's at a great price. I think the kids pay a huge, huge price for that.

Q: Nancy, if you were to give an overall evaluation of all the posts where you've been, how would you...

FORBORD: You mean I don't have to pick one? I can tell you an overall evaluation?
(laughs) Q: Just an overall impression.

FORBORD: We've just been so lucky because every post we've been to has been a very different experience. I mean even the one bad experience, which I would say was Australia, that we had, and that had nothing to do really basically with the country or the embassy. The people at the embassy were lovely. It was just the time wasn't right for us. We've had fabulous postings. I just can't imagine it could have been any better than it was.

Q: And if you were to make a list now for somebody else coming into the Foreign Service of the things that one should consider in deciding on a post...

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FORBORD: You know it's really interesting. I've thought a lot about this since our discussion prior to this interview. One of the drawbacks, I think, of all this planning that we all encourage might be that people are a little too careful sometimes. I don't think any of these posts we actually picked. It's strange. Not really picked. Either my husband was asked to go there for a specific reason or something. Except in the case of Australia where I would really, really suggest people check out the schools. And I would suggest you be extremely careful when your children are teenagers about any kind of moving. I guess that would be my recommendation.

Other than that, I would say don't try to find the perfect post because I don't think it works like that. I think a lot of it is luck. I think of it as a spirit of adventure. Being willing to go and take some risks maybe. You know, try some things you would never have tried otherwise. Kind of roll with the punches a little bit and just be willing to be open to whatever comes.

I think I would be a little careful maybe in terms of health. Right now, for example, I would be a little worried about going to some places in Africa because of malaria. When we were in Gabon we had an experience with malaria and with another tropical disease, and I have to say that, again, we've been very lucky. We could have been very sick. That certainly would change your experience. But for us, we've just been incredibly fortunate.

Q: Yes. Health seems like a big problem at times because it's something that you carry back.

FORBORD: That's right. It can haunt you for so long.

Q: It's not going to go away once you've got it.

FORBORD: There are some places now I'd be real afraid to go. I'd be really, really careful and cautious, I think, and maybe not go because of that. I don't think I'd ever be worried about... I would maybe be worried about security. I maybe would be worried about health, and, if I had children, education. I don't think the other things, like employment, I would

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be worried about. You know I love to work, but to me that's a somewhat peripheral issue because I feel like there is always something you can do that will enrich your life. That's what I've found. And I think if I had limited myself only to places where I could get a job.

Q: That's interesting, because I think that probably you would hear a lot of people say that they would find a post where the spouse can work, has a bilateral agreement, de facto agreement and so on. Something that they know the spouse can do for sure. That's interesting.

FORBORD: I would be much more inclined to look for an interesting culture, nice climate. (laughs) I think I would be reluctant to go to Moscow, even though it'd be a fascinating place.

Q: It's cold.

FORBORD: I know about myself. It's hard for me to enjoy when it's cold. So I think at this age I've decided there are certain things in my life that are very important to me and one thing is being warm.

Q: That's interesting. I think you just said to think about what is you and what is not you. You and your spouse, of course, and your family. What is not suitable is not something that somebody else can decide for you.

FORBORD: Absolutely. You can't. You know what you like to do, you know what makes your life happy. If you can't do those things... For example, if I had to go someplace right now where I couldn't have telephone contact with my kids at this age, that would just make my life miserable. I don't care. I think even if everything else were perfect, if I could not have contact with them on a regular basis, it just wouldn't be worth it to me.

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Q: What you're saying, though, it seems like, these needs change over time and so every time you're faced with a decision to go somewhere, you have to re-evaluate again the needs of your family, interests and so on.

FORBORD: Definitely. I think that's exactly what you have to do. And I don't think in the Foreign Service you can make long-term plans because you never know what's going to happen next with your life! (laughter) And you never know what opportunity might come knocking. You've sort of got to be ready for it if it comes, I think.

Q: Nancy, I'd like your views on the foreign-born spouses. We have talked about this a little bit in other contexts in conversations. I've heard that people mention foreign-born spouses are going to change the face of the Foreign Service. Is that an image that the United States wants overseas? Having all the different nationalities of spouses?

FORBORD: You see, unfortunately, it goes back to this lack of consideration for spouses, period. I don't think the bureaucracy is capable of that kind of thinking, unfortunately. I think if they were, they could use the richness of Foreign Service spouses. I don't think they're capable of that. I don't think they ever sit down and say, "What kind of a face do we want to present to the rest of the world?" If they had done that a long time ago, they would have done a lot more for the Foreign Service family than they have done. And "they" is really "us." We are the Foreign Service. We determine what we're going to do down the road.

Q: But I'm thinking in particular when, say, a foreign-born spouse... The criticism I've heard is, "How can you represent the United States if you haven't lived in the United States? If you don't speak English well? Is that an image that we want to present to the rest of the world?"

FORBORD: But you don't represent the United States. I mean, technically. Again, it's your spouse, it's the employee who does that. I think you do in that you go along with

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the employee, your family goes along. But I think to force that responsibility on a spouse is really not quite right. I think the United States is a country that is fluid enough in our development. Certainly right now. We are culturally so dynamic that I think this is just representative of our culture. It seems to me that it's a perfect representation of what's going on in the United States, so I think it's ideal. That would never even occur to me, Monique. That's an interesting question because that never would have in any way occurred to me.

The only place that I would be concerned about foreign-born spouses would be for them in the event of an evacuation and a safe haven. Other than that, I view Foreign Service spouses just like I view all the other people in the United States, as coming from all different kinds of backgrounds. I think it's great. And I think that, as far as our government's concerned, we're very lucky that we have that. Again, I just don't know whether or not the Foreign Service ever recognizes how fortunate it is to have families to help represent the U.S. overseas.

Q: Interesting. What I'm hearing is the very clear distinction that the employee is the person who is hired to represent the United States. I think it's not often articulated in such clear terms. Sometimes perhaps even spouses confuse themselves that they are assigned to be responsible for what goes on in the employees' work.

FORBORD: Yes. I think they are confused, and I think that maybe to a certain extent that has been a benefit for the Foreign Service that they are confused. I think they've done an awful lot. Contributed so much. And many spouses would totally disagree with me on this. I'll tell you, Monique. I know that. Many of them feel as though, again, the spouse is as much a representative. I have to look at the way the regulations are written, and according to the regulations, the spouse has absolutely no responsibility at all. Now in the case of anything going wrong, it will certainly reflect on the employee, and that's a reality.

Q: That's unfortunate.

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FORBORD: And that's unfortunate. And the employee may suffer as a result.

Q: If you think about it from a slightly different angle, you would think that of course whatever you do often reflects on your family, on everybody you know, so.

FORBORD: It's like that. That's how I would look upon it. But I think my viewpoint might be slightly different from other people's.

Q: Now what was the single most difficult challenge that you have faced in the last twenty-five years you've had? Have you ever thought of that?

FORBORD: Gosh, the single most difficult challenge. I suppose probably that decision to leave Australia because it was a decision that could have lead us to separation. If my husband had been forced to stay or give up his career, I don't know if he would have stayed or not. He may not have. But it would have forced us into a decision that would have been extremely difficult. And as it was, we were just so lucky that it worked out okay for us.

I would say in my life probably the most challenging thing I've ever faced was raising teenagers. (laughs) That doesn't have a whole lot to do with the Foreign Service. I think that's just a reality of the responsibility of raising teenagers. The most challenging and rewarding.

In the Foreign Service, I can't think of anything except for that period when it was difficult because it required a major decision. But looking back on it, it was great, you know.

Q: What about the funniest story you ever had?

FORBORD: Oh, well, Gabon is loaded with funny stories. There are just so many of them from Gabon.

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Q: Was there some romanticism from the first post? People often say that the first post was the best and the most romantic.

FORBORD: I don't think so. I think it was just a series of characters who were there, kind of the time of our life. There were just so many things that happened. I think being in a small post. Mostly young people there. We had a big turnover. When we first went to Gabon, it was a retirement post and most people were really old.

Q: Really!

FORBORD: And we thought, in fact, "Oh, my gosh, we're never going to fit in here." Because they were all old and we were real young. But then within six months, everybody turned over and we were all real young. We just had a lot of really funny things happen there. It's hard to put my finger on one thing that was more humorous than another. Even just the place that we lived, which was right on the water. It was an old apartment called the "Hugo Building." And it was just kind of dilapidated. There were just so many funny things.

Just for an example. There were six apartments. And five of them were occupied. The sixth apartment was on the ground floor and was reserved for happy hour on Fridays. So that was the only time we used it. We got movies that would come in on these big old-fashioned movie reels. They would go from post to post in Africa. And we'd get them every Friday if we were lucky, they'd come in. And sometimes six or seven horrible movies would arrive. But Friday nights they would have movies at this happy hour place. Several funny things were connected with that. One thing was, this apartment had been inhabited by somebody with a dog previously. And it was absolutely loaded with fleas.

Q: Oh, my God.

FORBORD: And everybody - like everybody meaning even the Peace Corps volunteers - there might be a hundred people there in this apartment. We'd all be there ready for the

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movie. And people would be sitting on the furniture and as the evening went on, everybody would jump out of the furniture because they were being bitten by all these fleas. That was one thing.

And then I remember one night when the movies were on and there was a Peace Corps volunteer who was up country who had adopted a baby chimp. And this chimp became quite famous, by the way. He eventually ended up in the Zoo in San Diego. But this Peace Corps volunteer adopted the chimp as a child, not as a chimp, and clothed him in all this clothing. And I remember one night, the first time I ever saw the chimp. Everybody was sitting on the floor watching these movies and the lights were off, and you could just see the lights from the reflection of the projector. And I remember I had gone out of the room for a second. And I came back in and it was all dark and I was trying to see the feet as I walked back to my place.

All the sudden I saw this pair of incredibly hairy legs that were about this long that had little socks on, little baby socks with little tiny tennis shoes. And I thought, "My God! How could a baby have legs like that?" And I looked and it was a chimp. It was the chimp and the chimp was asleep in his lap with his little legs sticking out. But he had little rompers on and these little shoes with the white socks. And there he was.

And he was there for about four more months because finally he got so wrapped up in the chimp that the Peace Corps gave him the option of either leaving the chimp or leaving the post, and he chose to leave the post with the chimp. So that was interesting. But there were so many things like that in Gabon that I could tell you fifty stories about life there.

Q: That was very funny. Nancy, I'd like to close on the question that you brought up regarding your children on the world view one gets from having the experience in the Foreign Service. How about your perspective this time. How the Foreign Service has changed your view or shaped your views over the years.

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FORBORD: Well, I think for me... You know, it seems to me that young people nowadays are much more grounded in their views and their beliefs than I was when I came into the Foreign Service. I think that I was, for some reason, sort of like a sponge. I didn't have particularly strong views one way or the other when I entered the Foreign Service with my husband. I think I probably just lived as a free spirit without really paying too much attention one way or another to develop any strong views about things. Other than politics. I always had strong views about politics.

But what I have to say is that I think my view of life has really been colored by what I've seen around the world. And the way I view life now, I think, is basically a result of having experienced a lot of different ways of living. I really believe that there are a lot of different lives you can lead. And a lot of different ways you can think and believe. And I think they're all right. I think it's just different people expressing their experience of life in different ways. So I have to say since I've experienced so many different kinds of life, I think that my view is that you really have to just try to experience life as best you can and basically respect everyone else's opportunity to do that.

I was just thinking in terms of sort of your basic philosophy of life. I think that I really do view life as a series of experiences. Just recently I was reading a book by Nietzsche and I found in there a quote that seemed to me to be appropriate for my life in the Foreign Service because I think it really does say a lot about how you learn from your experiences and how you really kind of establish your set of beliefs according to what you experience. At least I have. And Nietzsche said, "Read only your own life and from this understand the hieroglyphics of universal life." And I think that that's really what I have found for me living all these different lives has done. It's given me a code, I would say, by which to judge all of my experiences of life and put things in perspective.

Q: Like creating a framework for you to...

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FORBORD: Yes, in which I can operate. A framework of beliefs, of acceptance of people, of possibilities for change. All of those things.

Q: And how do your families feel about all this? Your being in the Foreign Service. Do they see you differently? Does that change your relationship? What kind of ideas do they have about the Foreign Service?

FORBORD: I think they think it's really great. In fact I think for the most part, most of them wish they'd been able to do it. I think they view it as just such an incredible opportunity.

Q: Because you mentioned that your father was a businessman and did not...

FORBORD: Yes, exactly. Even he came around a little bit before he died. He died about ten years ago, and I think even he was beginning to see that maybe this lifestyle wasn't all bad. That maybe there were some things about it that were really kind of nice. Because he loved to travel and I think he really, for the first time, thought that it offers a lot of really wonderful things.

Q: So you never felt that they were looking at you a little bit differently or have any problem relating to them your experiences?

FORBORD: No, I've never had any problem relating to them. Not at all. I guess the one thing that always surprises me, and everybody experiences this so my experience is not unique, is that it is pretty difficult to go into too much depth in talking about where you've been because, if people haven't been there, it's hard for them to maintain interest for very long in hearing your life experiences while you've been away.

Q: Like showing your picture book to other people.

FORBORD: Yes, right. So after about fifteen minutes, there's always the, "When I was there," or switching to another topic. I think that is hard for people. Although I've

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been amazed that in particular in my husband's family... My mother's always been very interested in travel, but my husband's family has not traveled much. But we can sit with his parents for hours and tell them about our experiences and they want to hear about all of them. I think for them it's really been wonderful having somebody in the Foreign Service in the family. They're very proud of that.

Q: Finally, when they come to visit, and I assume that some of your friends and family have visited you overseas, what kind of comments do they make about that? Is it like, "Oh this is what the Foreign Service is about!"

FORBORD: No, they never talk about the Foreign Service. Again, you see, I think even that... It's not really in the context of the Foreign Service, it's in the context of traveling around the world. They don't really think about it in terms of the Foreign Service. Even to this day they don't think about it that way.

Q: Is that right?

FORBORD: Yes.

Q: So they don't see your husband as representing the U.S. and doing...

FORBORD: They see that. Yes, they see that and they know he's a government employee. But they don't ever, I don't think, think about the Foreign Service as a separate entity, or the culture of the Foreign Service. None of that is of any interest to them whatsoever.

Q: So they have no illusion, as some people have, that the Foreign Service is all glamour and things like that?

FORBORD: I don't think so. No, in fact, I think that their initial reaction was the opposite. That it's going to be a real inconvenience for you all. You'll have to move around all the

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time and have to do all this. So I don't think that. I don't think they've ever had an idea that it was particularly glamorous.

Q: Was it for you?

FORBORD: Glamorous? I don't think so.

Q: What adjective would you use?

FORBORD: I would talk more, maybe, in terms of rewarding. Really an interesting life, illuminating, focusing, enlightening even. And certainly I've always always felt a great deal of appreciation for the opportunity. But glamorous, I don't think so. That hasn't been my experience. No, but I know many people do. Many, many people think that it is. I think it's a lot of hard work. It's tremendously hard work. I think that's the reason that even some of the glamorous events are glamorous because you have to work so hard. It's true. Whenever you go to an event, you're always there, it seems to me, doing something to help make that event a success. So I've never felt that it's really different from work, although it's very enjoyable work, but it's hard work.

Q: And the fact that you're still here!

FORBORD: Yes, I'm still here!

Q: And your husband is still working. He's now at the Senate office?

FORBORD: Yes, he's working for Senator Rockefeller.

Q: Well, I think we will stop here unless you have something else that you would like to mention.

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FORBORD: Well I can't think of anything Monique. I'm sure that we could probably go on for hours talking about all of this, but I think probably I've given you enough to think about and listen to. (laughter)

Q: Well, it's been very interesting and I've very glad that I've had the chance to do this with you. And I thank you for the Foreign Service Spouse Oral History Program.

FORBORD: You're very welcome. And thank you very much.

Q: Thanks.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Spouse: Thomas A. Forbord Spouse's Position: Economic Officer, DCM Spouse Entered Service: June 1966 You Entered Service: January 1967

Status: Spouse

Posts: 1967-1969Libreville, Gabon 1969-1972Milan, Italy 1972-1973Washington, DC 1973-1975Nairobi, Kenya 1975-1976Cambridge, Massachusetts 1976-1980Washington, DC 1980-1982Kingston, Jamaica 1982-1985Washington, DC Jan.-Oct. 1986Canberra, Australia Oct. 1986-1989Washington, DC 1989-1991Buenos Aires, Argentina

Place/Date of birth: Syracuse, Kansas - Dec. 21, 1943

Maiden Name: Jackson

Parents:

Hugh C. Jackson, private investor.

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Ada Jackson, housewife and mother

Schools: 1961Castilleja School, Palo Alto, California 1961-64Purdue University
1964-65Mozarteum, Salzburg, Austria 1965-66University of California at Santa Barbara
(BA) 1987Trinity College (MA) Georgetown University, Training Specialist certificate

Profession: Training and counseling

Date/Place of Marriage: December 31, 1966, Palo Alto, California

Children:

Eve Forbord, 1972

Austin Edward Forbord, 1970

At Post: 1967-69Representative for African American Institute, Libreville (paid)
1969-70English teacher, Milan, Italy (paid) 1974-76Editor, newsletter, Nairobi, Kenya
(Kenya National Museum Society) (volunteer) 1980-82CLO, Kingston, Jamaica (paid)
1980President, American Embassy Women's Association (volunteer) 1986Private
consultant, Canberra, Australia (education end training) (paid) 1991President, American
Embassy Women's Group, Buenos Aires, Argentina (volunteer)

In Washington, DC: 1978-80President and Executive Director, Washington Association for
Television and Children (WATCH) (paid for a few months) 1987Substitute teacher (paid)
1987-88Court mediator (stipend) 1988-90Relocation advisor, OBC (paid) 1991-92Training
consultant (paid) 1992Trainer, Political Training Division, Foreign Service Institute (paid)

Honors: Meritorious Honor Award, 1982

End of interview